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ABSTRACT

Starting with the contention that we need to restore a wider range of choice to parents in their children's education, this paper lists and reviews the varieties of public education currently available throughout the country, and discusses their advantages and disadvantages. These varieties include magnet schools, alternative schools, independent study programs, postsecondary enrollment plans for high school students to take courses at local colleges and universities, vocational education programs, and the GED (General Educational Development) testing program (in lieu of attending and completing school). Two other types of choice programs differ from the above in that they offer choices only to particular groups rather than to the community at large: regional, residential, specialty high schools sponsored at the state level for the most accomplished students in a given specialty (math and science, humanities, performing arts), and second chance arrangements for dropouts or for students who have consistently failed in regular schools. The second part of the paper reviews available choices in the private sector: parochial schools (Catholic, fundamentalist, or Jewish); private, residential prep schools for the wealthy; independent schools for disadvantaged minorities; proprietary business or trade schools that promise job training and placement to disadvantaged teenagers and young adults; and home schooling. (TE)

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PARENTS GUIDE ON CHOICE
The Right to Choose

by

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PARENTS GUIDE ON CHOICE

The Right to Choose

The discussions of philosophers often arrive at ultimate questions such as "Who is finally responsible for a child anyway? Is it the family or the state?" A society such as ours, however, yields no simple single answer to such questions. For *many* purposes, "the family" is clearly the proper answer -- e.g., for rearing the child, for clothing him or her, for selecting a church and a faith. But for other purposes, "the state" may be the more appropriate reply -- e.g., for protecting the child from severe physical abuse in the home, or for assuring that the child develops the capacity to become a contributing member of society rather than a steady drain upon it. *Both* parties have genuine and warranted interests in what the child becomes. Thus, it makes sense that both should have some sort of voice in determining the education the child shall receive. Society has an obvious interest -- as recent school criticism and demands for educational Excellence have underscored. But parents and families also have an interest -- and one which time and circumstances have tended increasingly to erode.

Over the years, parent prerogatives related to education have been subject to increasing denial. There are many reasons why this is the case, and the tendency is far broader, of course, than our educational arrangements and institutions. It can be traced to such extensive and far-reaching developments as population growth, large-scale institutions, bureaucratic organization, the growth of knowledge and professional expertise in human affairs, and the general tendency toward concentration or centralization of power. Many of these developments have brought

benefits, but a steady decline in the prerogatives of constituents has also been a part of the bargain. Such decline has brought the need for restoring a balance among the appropriate prerogatives of the several parties with an important stake in education: the families of those who receive it, the professionals who administer it, and the society that is shaped and limited by it.

Ever since the Supreme Court's famous Pierce decision of 1926, the right of parents to choose private or parochial schools for their children has been firmly established. But for the vast majority, whose children have attended public schools, the prerogatives have steadily become fewer. They are compelled by law to send their children to school, and they typically have little or nothing to say about where, with whom the child shall study, what, when, how, or to what purpose. Although some choices have been available in some schools at the secondary level, even there within-track options have been restricted. Yet parents are, of course, considered the primary guardians of their children and viewed responsible not only for seeing to their physical welfare but also for bringing them up and shaping the people they shall become. Parent rights and responsibilities appear incompatible with the current powers exercised by public schools. Indeed, it appears that the *shared* power arrangement, the deliberate division of authority, and the checks and balances so fundamental to our entire political system, no longer seem to be operating in relation to public education.

There have been no major changes in school control and governance structure for almost a century. Today's insistent calls for "restructuring" reflect the widespread conviction that changes are imperative in the way the public controls its educational institutions. Among the several sorts of changes now being urged by various groups, the enhancement and

extension of *choice* appears simultaneously to be one of the least radical, ultimately the most palatable to all concerned, and among the most promising.

A number of current restructuring proposals would quite extensively change our present school governance arrangements. For example, some are proposing the abolition of school boards, others are proposing that they be rendered largely impotent by shifting most of their powers to individual schools. Still others want to shift control in just the opposite direction, moving it from local district authorities to state officials. By contrast, the choice idea appears far milder and less extreme. It calls upon school officials only to diversify schools and to make them available upon an options, rather than an assignment basis. Yet the changes that can be anticipated in the wake of such a move are far-reaching and extremely positive. Evidence to date suggests that the choice arrangement ennances student growth and achievement; improves teacher productivity and morale; increases parents' satisfaction with their children's education; and benefits schools by improving their quality and rendering them open to continuing self-renewal.

The Choices Available

If one were fortunate enough to live in an area offering all the choices currently available to parents *somewhere* in this country, then there could be no complaints about a lack of options -- or about the oft-lamented, 'pervasive sameness' in schools. For despite the well-documented tendencies toward homogeneity and standardization, cumulatively there exists a vast array of types of schools each of which can be found somewhere. Collectively at least, they address youngsters of all sorts and ages, and educational preferences of virtually all stripes We present here a review of the varieties of education available across this land, even

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THE DIVERSITY OF SCHOOLS OF CHOICE

These are the particular orientations of the schools of choice of six sample cities: Buffalo, NY; Portland, OR; Montclair, NJ; Long Beach, CA; Los Angeles, CA; and Community School District 4 in Manhattan. Note the difference between a curricular orientation (left column) and some other (right column).

At the Elementary Level

- Science and Technology
- Multi-Cultural
- Futures Academy
- Bi-Lingual
- Science
- Computer
- Consumer Education
- Environmental
- Science and Humanities

- Gifted and Talented
- Montessori
- Community School
- Learning Community School
- Open
- Fundamental or Traditional
- Learning styles matching
- Multi-media
- Individually Guided Education
- Progressive

At the Middle and Junior High School Level

- Science and Technology
- Movement and Gymnastics
- Computer
- Environmental Science
- Careers Academy
- Creative Learning
- Performing Arts
- Math and Science
- Maritime School
- Communication Arts

- Traditional
- Learning Community
- Block School (parent involvement)
- Gifted and Talented
- Learning styles matching
- Sports School

At the Senior High School Level

- Performing Arts
- Visual Arts
- International Commerce
- Business High
- Communication Arts
- Zoo
- Health Professions
- Marine Science
- Humanities Academy
- Technical Occupations
- Math and Science

- Traditional
- City-as-School
- School-as-Family
- School as Community
- Gifted and Talented
- Marginal and 'at risk' students
- Unmet needs groups

though no single locale yet claims the full array.

We look first to choices available within public education, and subsequently to those which can be found or developed in the private sphere.

Choice in the Public Sector

Since the 1960s, public schools have generated a considerable array of schools of choice designed explicitly to offer something other than the 'standard' program regularly available within the district. For an idea of the rich diversity of present choices, see the chart on the following page with a sampling of the options offered by six cities. The precise nature of the departures from the typical, the groups for whom the programs are intended, the reasons for providing them, have differed considerably from one district to another. Sometimes the options have been created explicitly to respond to interests or requests expressed by students or their families. Sometimes they have been initiated by educators to respond to the needs of particular groups of students for whom regular programs have appeared inadequate. And sometimes -- particularly in the last several years -- they have been established by school officials in the interests of upgrading educational quality.

Probably the type of choice program available to more youngsters than any other is the *magnet* school. Such schools are most likely to be found in urban areas. The earliest were intended primarily to establish such attractive programs that they would draw people across racial lines and thus bring voluntary desegregation. More recently, magnet schools have been found a sufficiently effective means to improving school quality that some districts have looked extensively to them to bring educational excellence.

Magnet schools are designed to attract students and their families

either by featuring particular substance or content, or by reflecting a particular pedagogical orientation or approach. Magnets at the high school level most typically feature content; elementary magnets are usually distinguished by their educational orientation.

Elementary school magnets have prominently included open schools and traditional (sometimes called 'back-to-basics' or 'fundamental') schools. Open schools tend to give students a great deal of freedom and are interested in cultivating learner responsibility, independence, and creativity. Fundamental schools have sought to be more traditional and rigorous than are standard schools. Other varieties have featured Individually Guided Education (IGE -- a plan for individualizing instruction in preference to the typical group instruction arrangement) or a Montessori approach (a program providing structure and direction for learners, largely through the teaching materials used). The choice between an open and a traditional school is quite clearly a matter of differing educational philosophies, with different assumptions about what youngsters are like, what they need, and what is good for them. Even broader differences are likely to be reflected, too -- for example with respect to the nature of the world and of knowledge about it, and of what dimensions of life are most important.

The choice between IGE and Montessori programs tends to be less a matter of educational philosophies and more one of general instructional orientation. (Of course, an instructionally oriented program makes assumptions that are philosophical in nature -- and a philosophically oriented one pursues an instructional orientation. The differences between magnet schools flow largely from what they choose to emphasize. An open school and an IGE program, for example, may well share some common features. The considerable differences between them are a

matter of focus and emphasis. This, in turn, is largely a matter of the nature and scope of the beliefs and values guiding the staff.)

Allowing for notable exceptions, magnets at the high school level are more likely to feature content than educational philosophy A number of them specialize in particular disciplines or school studies -- e.g., Math and Science, or the Humanities, or the Visual Arts. Others emphasize particular career areas -- e.g., technology or computers -- while still others are organized along broad occupational lines, such as Health Services and International Commerce.

Magnets at the middle school or junior high levels often seek to combine the emphases commonly associated with elementary and with senior high school programs. They may, that is, stress both general orientation and a particular theme. Thus, there may be an emphasis on the kind of environment the school offers -- e.g., a family-style climate, or a program with extensive parent and community participation -- *and* a particular substantive focus may simultaneously be featured, such as sports, environmental ecology, or performing arts.

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that all magnet schools are organized along just these lines. It is possible to find some elementary magnets with a curricular focus, and some high school magnets with a primarily philosophic identification. It is also possible to find magnets at all three levels whose primary thrust is addressing a particular student population. Magnets for the gifted and talented are common, and at the secondary level some have been targeted for disaffected students or youngsters 'at risk' or for learners who are experientially- rather than academically-oriented.

Thus, magnet schools come in substantial array and are articulated by very different emphases. Ordinarily, their emphases are just that,

however, and do not represent singleminded preoccupations. Thus, a Math and Science magnet high school would still provide needed work in language, humanities, and social studies. And an open school, although probably emphasizing creative and expressive learning, would still provide work in the basics. The emphases, however, do bring particular advantages and disadvantages to each magnet program -- especially in relation to specific parental preferences and to specific interests and traits of youngsters. What is preferable and good for one will not necessarily prove ideal for another. And the advantage of having a rich selection of advanced electives in math and science, for example, may come at the cost of advanced offerings in other subject areas.

Generally speaking, magnet schools offer many advantages. They provide an option and an opportunity to leave what may be negative circumstances. Where their teachers have chosen the program, there is likely to be considerable staff agreement and cohesion, and instruction is likely to be superior to that available elsewhere. Under these cirumstances, there is also likely to be found among all associated with the school a sense of commitment, even of excitement, not commonly found elsewhere. All of these advantages are reflected in good magnet schools -- in addition to the obvious advantage of responsiveness to particular parent preferences and/or to specific student needs and interests.

Major disadvantages have attached primarily only to magnet schools that have been poorly designed or poorly implemented. Magnets whose themes tend to segregate youngsters by race or ability or socio-economic level can serve to isolate different groups of youngsters, and to give rise to tracking arrangements penalizing the less advantaged. And in locales where magnet schools have been rushed into being with insufficient

planning time -- or imposed on lukewarm teachers -- or where they have denied teachers the leeway and resources that program creation demands, magnets have proved capable of depressing teacher morale and incentives every bit as much as other school programs have sometimes done.

Thus, in choosing a magnet program, parents would do well to inquire explicitly about the racial and socio-economic backgrounds of its students and about their ability and achievement levels -- since the evidence finds exposure to classmates of a range of backgrounds and ability levels particularly important to the success of disadvantaged and low achieving youngsters. Parents would also be well advised to try to learn something of the history of the program they are considering, and how its teachers came to be affiliated with it. They need also to find out about the role of the magnet theme within the program. In less successful magnets it is never very extensively developed and the school may depart from standard practice largely in name only.

Some communities make *alternative schools* available as options to the standard school or program. Alternatives may be very like magnets, differing primarily only as to their number: magnet schools usually come in multiples so that the existence of one makes others likely. By contrast, an alternative school is more prone to exist singly within a district as the sole option to the otherwise standard program. (It must be noted, however, that terminology is not fixed, so that what is called an alternative in one district may be called a magnet in another.) "Alternatives" was the name given to the schools of choice emerging in the 1960s. Then, as now, they tended often to be programs designed to respond to the obvious needs or the clearly articulated concerns of particular groups. Thus, there are alternatives which have been planned for highly able students insistent upon a more challenging and rewarding

education, and there are programs for able youngsters who have become disaffected from school. Many districts have established alternative programs for youngsters 'at risk' of dropping out -- since the key features of alternatives tend to match those found important to dropout prevention.

Alternative schools are likely to be marked by small scale and relatively close contact. Most alternatives number 200 or fewer students, and many have only 40 or 50. They are likely to be less formal than conventional schools since their size permits them to function successfully this way. They are also likely to look almost, as one observer put it, like "membership" organizations to which students feel very strongly tied. Both by design and by virtue of the small staffs that are typical, many alternative schools have devised innovative curricula and learning activities.

The advantages of alternative schools are considerable. Most concern themselves with a broad spectrum of students' growth and development, as well as with their academic achievement, and this offers substantial benefits: Youngsters' attitudes toward education and toward themselves often change dramatically for the better. The typical alternative school's emphasis on school climate tends to yield a supportive environment -- which is often particularly helpful to adolescents.

The major disadvantages of alternative schools flow from their advantages: their smallness means that there will be fewer advanced courses to select among, and fewer specializations represented among each program's teachers. As a result of their size, alternatives generally also lack the facilities and equipment of conventional schools. It is possible to offset both these disadvantages, and there are alternatives which manage to do so via arrangements with neighboring institutions; but not all of them have managed to make and implement such

arrangements.

The tendency to establish alternative schools as a response to the needs or interests of particular groups has already been noted. Families considering an alternative would do well to find out the reason for its existence and the group intended. This seems particularly important since, as also noted, the alternative school is likely to be the sole available alternative to the conventional program. Yet it is by no means clear that all students who do not fit neatly into slot A will fit slot B. Perhaps they need slot C or D or H. The personalized nature of most alternative schools attaches particular significance to the need for a match between student and program. A several-hour visit to the alternative school by the prospective student and parents is particularly advisable to see whether there will be a good fit.

In many locales, *independent study* options constitute a choice for students. In some they may be offered within the regular high school, possibly in the junior high. Under such auspices, the amount of work a student can take in independent study is usually limited to one or two units. Independent study is an option within many alternative schools. In some, such pursuits may represent a substantial portion of a student's work (e.g., a year's worth or more of credit), while in others the option may be limited to the equivalent of several courses. In some alternatives, the pedagogical approach is such that students work independently for most of the time, on an agreed-upon plan. Under some arrangements, this is a matter of individualized study or research assignments carried out largely within the school; under others, it may involve out-of-school study -- for example, a building project, travel, an assignment in a hospital laboratory or a government office. One of the most novel alternatives evolved in the 1960s was the school-without-walls, which

worked out individual assignments for students, having them study through observation and participation activities in the community. There have been many such programs launched in the wake of the original Parkway School in Philadelphia. Parkway remains in operation, along with New York's City-As-School, as models for other districts seeking to establish similar programs.

The obvious advantages of independent study possibilities lie in the opportunities they open for responding to students' interests. Students who are sufficiently motivated and able to work alone and relatively unsupervised can benefit enormously from such opportunities. On the other hand, youngsters needing a fair amount of structure and supervision, or sustained engagement with peers, may find independent study a lonely and minimally rewarding pursuit. There are also, perhaps, some students who would succeed well at independent study -- but for whom the classroom contact and peer interaction might prove even more valuable and educationally productive.

Half a dozen states now make it possible, through *postsecondary enrollment plans,* for high school students to take courses at local colleges and universities at state expense. The financing consists in the transfer of the appropriate portion of state-allotted monies from the high school to the college attended. In Minnesota, where the arrangement seems to have been studied and discussed most extensively, youngsters can opt to pursue anything from a course or two, up to a full program in a local college; and they can elect to receive either high school or college credit for their work. A number of students have taken advantage of the year-old program and a detailed study found participants to be succeeding in it and to be quite positive about their experience within the program. It constitutes still another arrangement broadening the choice opportunities

of families, and hence their chances to exert control over their children's education. Youngsters have found the experience interesting and reassuring with respect to their ability to cope with college. Many, including some who have been indifferent high school students, have found the college experience more challenging and have proved far more successful at it. Disadvantages in the arrangement include travel or transportation requirements it can impose, and the separation of the youngster from high school peers and the high school's extra-curricular program -- two forms of separation of significance and importance to many adolescents.

Most sizeable school districts offer *vocational education* programs. Such programs have a century-long history, constituting the earliest 'alternatives' to the standard academic high school. Over the years, they have thus enrolled large numbers of students. But in a system increasingly dominated by a 'one best way' orientation, vocational schools have often been viewed and treated as second class citizens. Critics within the schools have sometimes believed vocational schools to have inferior students and programs. Outside the schools, critics from business and industry have sometimes charged that vocational schools teach outdated skills on obsolescent equipment -- and that in any case, they would prefer to provide such training themselves. In the last several years, with the national emphasis on academic exccellence, vocational education has been under severe criticism -- particularly in light of the finding that such preparation does not appear to affect employment opportunities very substantially. Nevertheless, vocational schools offer one more option and possibility for young people. A number of the students who attend them go on to further education following high school, and a number of others use the vocational program to explore career possibilities. Thus, vocational

high schools appear to be serving a useful purpose even if they do not meet the employment promise some expect of them.

Finally, there remains the *GED option* permitting people to pass a test of General Educational Development in lieu of attending and completing school. Successful completion of all five parts of the examination earns a high school diploma. Large numbers of adults as well as young people pursue this opportunity each year, as it serves those economically or otherwise unable to attend school, as well as others who don't wish to. Developed and administered by the American Council on Education, the test is given monthly in many locales. A number of states sponsor three- or four-month preparation courses helping candidates to ready themselves for the seven-hour test battery which consists of sections on writing, social studies, science, reading, and math.

Certainly this additional option is a benefit to a large number of people who wish to complete high school for personal reasons or to widen employment opportunities or gain other job advantages. A number of dropouts pursue the GED opportunity subsequent to leaving school. Evidence surrounding the exam raises questions, however, as to whether a young person is wise to leave high school in favor of taking the test. In the first place, a substantial percentage of the candidates fail any given test. 1986's failure rate was 34%. A recent study done for the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction also questions the value of a GED diploma. The military does not consider it the equivalent of school completion. And there is evidence that GED recipients are far less likely to complete college or other post-high school educational programs than are high school graduates. Thus, while the GED option can be viewed a good retrospective opportunity for those who did not complete high school, it does not appear to offer prospects equal to those of school attendance.

The programs and arrangements reviewed so far have been generally open or accessible to all students. Although there are exceptions, most magnet and alternative programs are open to most students. (Exceptions include those targeted for the gifted and talented, or for prospective performing artists -- both of which may have highly selective admissions criteria.) Two types of choice programs have become popular in the last several years, however, which offer choices only to particular groups. The first consists in the *regional, residential, specialty high schools* that have been established in a number of states. Sometimes called "Governors' High Schools" due to the sponsorship that is most typical, these schools are designed for the ablest and most accomplished students in the specialty area (e.g., Math and Science, Humanities, Performing Arts). They can extend choice, then, only to a very small percentage of a state's youngsters. Although it is probably too early to see systematic evaluations of these programs, in principle they ought to be able to offer the advantages of an elitist education, including high academic standards and focus, strong peer stimulation, outstanding teachers, and probably exceptional facilities. For the youngsters selected, disadvantages in the arrangement could attach to the need to leave home and peers, the possible overriding or exclusion of other values and concerns in favor of maximizing the academic, and perhaps strong pressures resulting from the situation.

Another optional program that has opened in the last several years is designed for youngsters who have consistently proved unsuccessful in school. Five states now have special *second chance* arrangements for such students. In Colorado, those who have failed a specified number of courses over a several-year period may choose to attend another public school in their own or another district. In other states, legislation has

been proposed that would enable eligible "second chance" students to select among private as well as public schools. By and large it is too early to tell whether the arrangement will generate increasingly effective programs for the intended target group. But certainly the opportunity for a youngster who has consistently failed in one environment to shift to another opens the possibility of a fresh start and thus offers promise.

The second chance opportunity offered by some states is of a somewhat different order. It is also a 'last chance' program offering added opportunity within privately operated "educational clinics" reimbursed by the state for helping school dropouts to complete their education. As one official description puts it, these clinics are "special-purpose schools for... [the] ...removal of the skill, knowledge and behavioral barriers that prevent dropouts from productive participation in society." Such arrangements exist by state action in California, Oregon, and Washington. Facilitating statutes in Washington specify that after a certain period, students are eligible to take the GED exam or to return to the school from which they had dropped out.

The clinics are devoted to teaching basic academic skills and to providing employment orientation. They make a detailed diagnosis of the educational needs of each student and work with students individually and in small groups.

As with other types of second chance programs, this one too is an advantage in providing one more opportunity and choice for young people who have not enjoyed school success. In principle at least they are designed for students who appear unable to succeed in public school classrooms without substantial prior remediation. Perhaps the major questions to consider in exercising this option are (1) whether a particular youngster is likely to complete the program prescribed for him or her by a

clinic; and (2) whether such a candidate is likely subsequently to be able to pass the GED exam or to successfully return to a conventional school.

These, then, are the major types of educational choice within the public sector open to families in one or another of the nation's school districts. But not only do the existing choices differ from locale to locale; so do the arrangements sustaining them. Because these arrangements can influence the number and nature of the programs themselves, they are worth mentioning here. We have already seen the difference it can make whether a school of choice is a magnet or an alternative school. There are other organizational arrangements which may also prove predictive about the choices available.

Some areas have cross-district enrollment arrangements, some have open enrollment systems. The cross-district arrangement enables students from one school district to enroll in another -- a practice that is otherwise prohibited. The arrangement is typically adopted to satisfy specific purposes. It exists in a number of rural areas, for instance; in order to increase the curricular choices open to students beyond what any single school could provide. It has also been used to desegregate urban schools by trying to attract students from surrounding suburbs to enroll in city programs, and encouraging urban youngsters to enroll in suburban schools. Within some cities the cross-district plan is enabling families to select schools with particular programs in other districts, or simply to choose programs of high quality. Thus, in New York's Community School District 4, approximately one-sixth of the enrollment consists of students coming from other districts to attend the unusual programs available in Spanish Harlem.

The open enrollment idea works somewhat differently. Instead of a deliberate plan to pool resources across districts -- or a general relaxing

of prohibitions against crossing district lines -- open enrollment permits any student to enroll within any school of the appropriate grade level. The arrangement has been tried in a number of cities, and is currently under consideration in several states. The major initial impetus was the desegregation potential of letting people choose a school; the current rationale is that open enrollment should enable people to seek good schools, abandon poor ones, and in so doing set up forces that will improve all schools.

Experience with city open enrollment possibilities suggest that the opportunity to transfer to another school may attract few takers in the absence of clear diversification among schools. Unless the school that can be chosen differs in some visible, comprehensible way from the one that is closer and more convenient, there seems to be little incentive to transfer. Thus, the extent to which open enrollment plans will serve to increase the choices open to families will depend upon the extent to which they produce genuine diversity among the schools involved.

This exhausts the major types of choices within the public sector, as well as the major approches to sustaining choice systems in public schools. But there are also private school and home school options that families can pursue. We turn now to a review of these private sector opportunities which currently enroll 11% of the nation's school-aged children.

Private Sector Choice

The most numerous and familiar variety of non-public school is the *parochial school*. Approximately 90% of non-public schools have religious affiliation. And of these, Catholic schools enroll the largest number of students, with Evangelical Christian schools a rapidly growing second. (Catholic school enrollments still outnumber Christian school enrollments,

however, by approximately three to one.) Most parochial schools are at the elementary level, many extending through grade 8. Most are likely to attract a localized clientele, being parish- or church-centered. Both the number of religious schools and the denominations sponsoring them have increased substantially over the last two decades (with the exception of Catholic schools), and parents seeking religious education can now choose among Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish schools of various religious persuasion.

Until fairly recently, it was widely supposed that despite its personal value to those selecting it, parochial school education was inferior to that offered in public schools -- since public schools represent higher expenditures, and hence can usually afford better facilities and pay higher teacher salaries. Over the past several years, however, that belief has been subject to considerable challenge, by two types of findings. One is that inner city minority youngsters sometimes do better in private schools -- and especially in parochial schools -- than in public. The second finding is that a number of the organizational characteristics responsible for school success appear more abundant in private schools -- and again, most particularly in parochial schools -- than in public. Thus, parochial schools seem to offer genuine advantages to those attending them, beyond the obvious benefit of responding to family values and belief patterns. Some would list, however, as disadvantages of parochial schools their lower budgets, their partial exemption in most states from standards and requirements which public schools must meet, and the separatism they represent. Most of those with reservations about private and parochial school education have expressed concern about separatism -- religious, ethnic, and socio-economic. And many have been concerned in principle about the elitism which can follow from such separatism, as well as about

its effects on the less fortunate.

Probably the nation's most prestigious schools have been the private, non-sectarian, residential *prep schools* to which the wealthy send their children. Such schools are not very numerous, although many cities have one or two private day schools that are widely perceived as the most elite and distinguished in the area. The advantages of such schools are genuine for the families who can afford them. Many offer a good education and the likelihood of admission to outstanding colleges for their graduates. Whether as cause or effect, studies also show that the graduates of such schools are likely to occupy lucrative positions and enjoy successful careers. From the standpoint of the individual, the major disadvantages of such programs are that relatively few can enjoy them, and, according to some, that they place extraordinary pressures on the young to accept and internalize upper class values.

However, not all private, non-sectarian schools are institutions for the elite, even though enrollment in such schools is closely correlated with family income. Yet the establishment in inner city enclaves, of *independent schools* expressly for the disadvantaged minority youngsters who live in such areas, appears a growing trend. Thus, a study of several years ago found 50 such schools in inner city Chicago. Since inner city public schools are frequently the weakest and most troubled in the public sector, the availability of additional options is a considerable advantage to families. Disadvantages of enrollment include the tuition fees, possible transportation difficulties, and the lack of economic stability of many of these programs.

There are other privately operated schools designed primarily for disadvantaged teen-agers and young adults which have a somewhat less positive record. These are the *proprietary business or trade schools*

targeted for dropouts and others seeking employment opportunities. There are approximately 6,000 such schools according to estimates. They often offer assurances of job possibilities and even of placement, and they typically promise preparation in a particular set of presumably saleable skills. Applicants are encouraged by such promises, as well as by state and federal tuition assistance for such schooling.

Certainly, additional job opportunities are a crucial advantage in areas where youth unemployment rates are staggering -- and this is the population that proprietary career schools typically seek. Thus, the young person who finds a reputable trade school preparing him adequately and then placing him in a job, has been helped enormously. Recent studies by both federal and state authorities suggest, however, that the promises that draw young people to such programs frequently remain unfulfilled. Apparently, a number of abuses exist -- with respect to admissions, the kind and amount of instruction offered, and the chances of program graduates to find employment. So careful investigation is important before signing up for such a school.

There is yet another kind of 'private schooling' to which a number of families have turned, particularly for young children. This is *Home Schooling* -- the arrangement whereby parents instruct their own youngsters at home, sometimes including the children of likeminded friends and neighbors. Home schooling has become the choice of a surprising number of families. The total is not large -- variously estimated at from 50,000 to 260,000 children -- but in a society of such specialization as ours, it is surprising to encounter the practice at all. Some parents have turned to home schooling as a result of their rejection of the other choices open to them -- sometimes for reasons of their youngsters' special needs or school experience. Others have embraced the

home schooling arrangement as a strong preference in principle. In some cases, the parents providing the instruction have been well educated themselves, and some have included certified teachers. There are commercial sources of teaching materials that help, and several national networks that facilitate support and exchange among families involved in home schooling.

Historically, of course, a great deal of a child and adolescent's education took place in the home, both as a consequence of direct instruction and of participation in normal home activities. There are clear advantages in such an arrangement, including the family's obvious interest in and concern for the child's wellbeing, and the advantages of being able to learn naturally rather than under the artificial and contrived circumstances of schools. But there are disadvantages, too -- even for the rare family whose lifestyle can accommodate keeping youngsters at home fulltime for an extended period. The things that can be taught and learned under the natural circumstances of participation may fall considerably short of a full curriculum. And even well educated parents may be unable to provide the breadth of content typically thought desirable as the child becomes an adolescent. A final disadvantage emphasized by some is that children need the association of other children, as well as contact with a number of adults, in order to develop socially as well as personally and intellectually.

Conclusion

To date, this is the array of major options open to American families in the education of their children. The variety of types is impressive. Within the public sector, there are magnet schools and alternatives, independent study possibilities, vocational schools, postsecondary enrollment options, the GED option, and specialty programs for particular groups such as the

highly accomplished or the youngster in need of a second chance or the dropout wanting to attend an educational clinic. When viewed together, these diverse educational possibilities seem capable of responding to virtually all parent preferences and all the needs and interests of children. Yet the supplementary array constituting private sector education makes that unnecessary, adding parochial and prep and other independent schools, proprietary trade schools, and home schooling. It must be kept in mind, however, that nowhere -- in no single town, city, or county in this country -- is it in fact possible to view all of these choices together. Some locales continue to offer little or no educational choice to families -- and *no* locale yet offers the full range discussed here. Perhaps that day will come soon.

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